(U) Speak Easy: Take-Away Documentation

FROM: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Meadeators Club
Run Date: 08/09/2005

(U) Words of advice on public speaking. This article is best viewed in Explorer or Netscape 7. (Entire text is unclassified.)

It is often helpful to give your customers information to take with them, because they can't remember everything you tell and show them.

Some briefers don't understand the "less is more" theory. If you give people a stack of papers, what are the odds that they will read them? I'll tell you: zero. People are busy, and when they return from a briefing with two pounds of documentation, it will sit on their desk or in their flipper cabinet for a few days or weeks before getting thrown into a burn bag. Even in our computer-driven environment, tons of paper and ink are still being wasted and innocent trees are dying for no good reason.

So, if you must give people anything to take with them, try to list all the information succinctly on one sheet of paper. I have never in my 21 years at NSA been to a presentation whose salient points could not be listed on a single page, and I'd be willing to bet that your briefing will be no exception.

Here is a small example of poorly written, space-consuming notes that typically get foisted on unsuspecting attendees:

The Transylvanian Crisis

- Vampires in our midst, blending in with the population. While we sleep, they steal our lifeblood.
- Symptoms of blood loss:
    - listlessness
    - fatigue

- thirst
- Has been going on since the year 839.
- Federal funding to deal with this problem has doubled to $10 million annually.
- Fighting this problem will require:
  - patience
  - diligence
  - wooden stakes
- Need to ethnically profile vampires. Typically they have:
  - long teeth
  - strange clothing
  - light complexion
- We must boycott vampires' partners:
  - IRS
  - Michael Jackson
- Together we can win!
- Point of contact: █

First of all, the large font is unnecessary. We are not a bunch of geriatric patients who need lettering the size of Madagascar. Second, it is not necessary to reiterate the problem and its symptoms, or give useless information such as when the problem started or how much federal funding there is; these can be stored on a Web page for anyone who cares enough. In fact, all information should be available on NSANet, and the handout should list those sites. Consider the following succinct version of the above notes.

The Transylvanian Crisis

- Problem defined at
  http://transylvania/problem
- Preventive measures:
  - Ethnic profiling
    (http://transylvania/profiling)
  - Boycotting vampires' partners
    (http://transylvania/partners)
  - Attacking with stakes
    (http://transylvania/stakes)
- POC: ██████████ ██████████, ████████
  (secure)

People who have a genuine interest in the subject will read the sheet and visit the sites, whereas if you had listed everything on several pages, they might have been discouraged by the sheer volume. Anyone who throws away the single sheet wasn't interested anyway since you made it so easy for them and they still didn't use it.

Giving people Web sites facilitates collaboration. When they send e-mail they don't need to type much information themselves -- they can simply list a Web site's URL or copy and paste from it.

The bottom line is that the less you inundate people with, the more likely you are to get your point across.

Next month: Game Day